DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 569 EA 023 090

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TITLE Responses to Restructuring and Empowerment Initiatives: A Study of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Organizational Leadership, Decisionmaking and Climate.
PUB DATE Apr 92
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Organizational Change; *Participative Decision Making; Principals; *Role Perception; *School Based Management; *School Restructuring; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Empowerment

ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined teachers' and principals' perceptions of organizational changes affecting their professional work as a result of restructuring are presented in this paper. The multiple case study of two elementary, two middle, and two high schools derived data from interviews with each principal and from questionnaires administered to 32 elementary, 75 middle, and 85 high school teachers. The questionnaire explored teachers' perceptions about six school condition variables: principal leadership; teacher initiative; student learning; discipline; teacher involvement in planning; and school climate. Findings indicate that teachers and principals in general reported similar descriptions of restructuring and that differences were related to role specific changes. Specifically, restructuring and empowerment initiatives contributed to role conflict and strain. School environments characterized by poor teacher/principal relations were more likely to resist restructuring. It is recommended that teachers and principals understand how changes affect role holders and inform other stakeholders. One table is included. (15 references) (LMI)

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Responses to restructuring and empowerment initiatives: A study of teachers' and principals' perceptions of organizational leadership, decisionmaking and climate

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Introduction

Empowerment and restructuring remain illusive terms for describing current changes in organizational structures, roles and professional work in schools. In response to persistent calls for improvement in school effectiveness, these latest buzz words of educational reform have spawned a variety of initiatives such as America 2000, the New American School Development Corporation, the Empowered School Project and various model schools programs. As experiments in the design and delivery of public education develop, it is reasonable to assert that initiatives undertaken to reconfigure schools and to rethink teaching learning processes in them for the improvement of student performance will significantly affect the work lives of teachers and principals. Since teachers and principals are key actors who will ultimately implement and live with these changes, it is important to understand how they understand these changes and their impact on their professional work roles and environments.

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a follow-up investigation which examined teachers' and principals' perceptions of six important organizational factors. The following questions framed the investigation.

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1. Do teachers and principals report similar experiences with and reactions to restructuring events in their schools?

2. Within change environments in which adjustments in roles, rules, relationships and responsibilities are occurring, what do principals and teachers say about the impact of these adjustments on six school condition factors:principal leadership, teacher initiative in and control over school environment, student learning environments, discipline in the school, teacher involvement in planning activities in the school, and school climate?

Theoretical Framework/Background

Restructuring and empowerment have high visibility and currency in contemporary professional literature, in political arenas at state and federal levels, and in the parlance of professional meeting presenters. The notion of a systematic, though at times idiosyncratic, process by which teachers would assume greater responsibility in their professional work life reflects the latest educational reform wave. These latest reform efforts are aimed at significant improvements in student outcomes in schools by freeing educators up from the shackles of school bureaucracy and limited possibilities through organizational restructuring and enhanced professional autonomy. Professional autonomy is not a new phenomenon. It is rooted in at least three major areas of research. The first includes findings from investigations of participatory decisionmaking, professional development, job enrichment, professional autonomy and efficacy. Erlandson and Bifano (1987) wrote. "The considerable amount of research and informed opinion on shared decision making in schools builds a strong case that a more professional, autonomous

role for teachers could enhance the effectivenesss of the public school" (p. 33). The second area includes a substantial body of research on leadership and power. Seminal works resulting in alternative taxonomies of power French and Raven (1959), McClelland(1975), Hagberg (1984), and Yukl (1989) help to frame restructuring processes and their impact on teachers and principals within a larger conceptual framework. In an earlier report of principal interview data, Bredeson (in press) reported significant readjustments in sources of power for building principals. "Changes in allocations of power based on formal position, personal attributes and political strategies have changed the day-to-day working relationships of these teachers and principals."

A third major area which provided a useful analytical framework for this investigation was role transition theory. As restructuring initiatives evolve in local school districts across the nation, teachers, principals and others will reassess, redefine and renegotiate traditional educational roles. Recent works by Timar (1989), Corbett (1990), Shedd (1988), Hart and Murphy (in press) and Bredeson (1991) all describe the linkage between current school restructuring and changes in roles for educators. Sharing decisionmaking processes, greater professional autonomy, readjustments in sources of power, and role transition represent the context of restructuring occurring in the six schools described in this paper.

Methodology

Multiple-Case Study Design

To address the major research questions, the investigator used a multiple-case study design. Yin (1989) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that, "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Teachers' and principals' perceptions of the impact of restructuring and empowerment initiatives in their schools on their professional work lives are the phenomena of interest described in this paper. Since organizational context and individual perceptions and meanings ascribed to restructuring of roles, rules and relationships were not easily separable, it was important to examine each case within its unique school context as well as make comparisons across cases. The third criterion for use of a case study design is that the researcher uses multiple sources of evidence. Two primary data sources were used: interview data from principals and teacher perception data from a standardized, state-wide assessment.

Selection of School Sites

Since the general purpose of the investigation was to examine restructuring processes and their impact on teachers, principals, and the environments in which they worked, it was important to identify relevant sites in which restructuring initiatives had been undertaken. These six schools were part of a

larger sample of schools described in earlier papers by Bredeson (1989, 1991). The researcher employed a colleague nomination process to identify appropriate school sites. State department of education personnel, regional service unit administrators, school superintendents and university researchers were asked independently to identify schools and/or districts in which significant restructuring and teacher empowerment efforts were underway. Based on the list of nominees, two elementary, two middle and two high schools were included in this investigation.

Data Collection

Interview Data

In this study two primary sources of data were used. Structured interviews, lasting from forty-five minutes to one hour and a half, were conducted with each building principal. Using conventional field study notations, the researcher recorded all responses in field notes using a combination of symbols and longhand script. All responses were recorded on an interview protocol and at the end of each day transcribed on to computer text files. To check for accuracy of recorded responses and to develop transitional queries throughout the interview, the investigator frequently repeated recorded responses to the principals. After each interview, the researcher spent time recording additional contextual information in field notes and checking for accuracy of recorded responses. These computer text files with interview responses categorized by item and by respondent formed one data set which was amenable to various

analytical strategies including cross checking for consistency of responses within respondent sets, structural corroboration with teacher perception data, pattern making, and theme identification.

Teacher Perception Data

The State Board of Education of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania developed and mandated goals for quality education. The Department of Education then created an assessment bureau to translate Board mandates into workable plans for assessment. This assessment evolved into the EQA (Educational Quality Assessment), designed to assess student achievement of quality education goals, both cognitive and non-cognitive reported by school. The test was administered statewide to students in grades 4,6,7,9, and 11. In addition to student performance data, classroom teachers were asked to complete a fifty-six item questionnaire which asked for teacher responses to questions about satisfaction with relationships with parents, class size, teacher education and number of formal observations of classroom instruction. On forty items, teachers were asked for their perceptions about six important school condition variables. The following are operational definitions for these six variables.

Principal Leadership: Teachers were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed (4-strongly agree to 0-strongly disagree) with eight positive statements about leadership in the school. The principal leadership score could range from 0 to 32 with a higher score indicating that teachers were more satisfied with

leadership by the building principal.

Teacher Initiated Environment: Teachers were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with nine positive statements about their initiative in and control over school environment factors. The teacher initiative score could range from 0 to 32 with a higher score indicating that teachers felt they had more control over positive aspects of the school atmosphere.

Student Learning Environment (Disruption): Teachers were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with two positive and six negative statements about disruption to classroom instruction. The total score could range from 0-32 with a higher score indicating that teachers reported fewer disruptions to classroom instruction.

Discipline: Teachers were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with six positive and two negative statements about their perceptions of discipline in the school. The total score could range from 0-32 with a higher score indicating that teachers perceived that discipline was handled better in the school.

Teacher Involvement in Planning: Teachers were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with seven positive statements about their involvement in various types of planning activities for the school. The total score could range from 0-28 with a higher score indicating that teachers felt they were more highly involved in planning activities which take place in the school.

School Climate: Teachers were asked to indicate the degree to

which they agreed with one negative and three positive statements about the working environment in the school. The total score could range from 0-16 with a higher score indicating that teachers felt that the school had a better working environment.

Results from the survey were then reported back to each school with state norms, including correlation coefficients among school condition variables and student cognitive and non-cognitive measures, as well as comparative norms with mean scores, standard deviations and percentile distributions. Each school could then use these data to examine their student performance data and school condition variables relative to those of other schools across the state that participated in the assessment for that year.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included the use of a constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Patterns and themes from interview data were developed. As this analysis continued the investigator employed structural corroboration, which played patterns and themes developed from interview data from principals against teacher perception data reported on the EQA assessment. As Eisner (1979) suggested, "Structural corroboration is a process of gathering data or information and using it to establish links that eventually create a whole" (p. 215). The whole in this analysis represented an accurate description of the perceptions of principals and teachers about the impact of restructuring on their professional work lives in

each school. Descriptions of principals' perceptions have been presented in other papers by the author (Bredeson, 1989, 1990, 1991). Once a description of restructuring and its impact on the work lives of principals and teachers was completed, then comparative analysis across schools could be made and broader patterns and themes were developed.

Presentation of Findings

The results of a comparison of principals' and teachers' perceptions of six important organizational factors will be presented in this section. Personal interview data from six principals will be played against teacher survey data from each school. Two questions guide the presentation of these comparisons. 1.) Do teachers and principals report similar experiences with and perceptions of restructuring events in their schools? 2.) Within dynamic organizational environments in which adjustments in roles, rules, relationships and responsibilities are occurring, what do principals and teachers say about the impact of these adjustments on six school condition variables: principal leadership, teacher initiative in and control over school environment, student learning environments, discipline in the school, teacher involvement in planning activities, and school climate?

To address the first research question, eleven individual items from the 56 item survey were examined against principal interview data. These items were grouped into four areas: problem solving, communications, overall school environment, and

teacher work. Teachers' and principals' perceptions of these four factors within each school were very similar. Both teachers and principals viewed problem solving strategies in their schools as ones in which people took action to deal with problems rather than simply talking about them. The principals described how teachers dealt with any number of problems without having to check with them first. One high school principal noted. "People here solve problems for themselves. We don't have people coming in for every little issue." Decentralized control of decisionmaking required mutual confidence and trust in people and the outcomes of those decisions. Since teachers did not want to be, nor practically could they be involved in all decision making in their schools, they had to trust that the principal handled teacher concerns, dealt with problems and made decisions based on their input and their shared understandings of issues in key decision arenas. Principals needed to trust in both decision processes and decision outcomes, even if they might have dealt with the problem differently. Open and honest communication between teachers and principals, patience and respect for each other's professional judgement were important factors which sustained collegial, supportive professional work environments.

At Hillview Middle School (Principal-C Table 1), efforts to move the school from a low achieving school to a successful one resulted in a highly contentious environment. The principal described his school as one in which teachers were highly involved in decision making and therefore more concerns were

aired. There was more discussion about everything and nearly every issue of daily work life was open to debate and discussion. This lively environment made consensus building difficult for the principal and teachers. This dynamic environment was perceived negatively by teachers. The principal saw the airing of concerns as evidence of open communications. Slightly over one half of the teachers believed communications within the system to be restricted and that the principal did not maintain frank and open communications with teachers.

Comparisons of principal interview data with teacher survey data also suggest that in the areas of overall school environment and teacher work, teachers and principals in five of the six schools viewed aspects of their professional work life favorably. However, at Hillview Middle school, where everything was open to debate and discussion, the greatest discrepancies in perception between the principal and teachers were evident. The principal described his tendency to over lead because he wanted to make sure that decisions made were ones that would be good for kids. The teachers (19 out of 27) described their work environment as overly restrictive. In addition, 20 out of 27 teachers perceived the overall school environment to be negative. Teachers reported an overall negative feeling about the school. The overall negative perception of school climate by teachers had an effect on their feelings about other facets of their professional work. Again slightly more than one half of the teachers reported that they spent too much time on non-instructional duties, only

occasionally or rarely/never had input into curriculum planning and were not provided with adequate release time or financial support for in-service training. What this suggests is that there is a strong relationship among teachers' overall perceptions of school climate, principal leadership and other aspects of their work life.

In the area of teacher work environment, responsibility for non-instructional duties was an area of concern for both teachers and principals across the six schools. Each of the principals indicated that restructuring and empowerment had put additional demands on teachers and on principals. For teachers, this meant more involvement in decision arenas beyond the classroom. Higher levels of involvement in decision making and planning was a mixed blessing for teachers. It enabled them to exercise greater influence on important professional work life issues while at the same time their participation required them to leave the classroom and their students. The dispersion of scores on individual items included in the Teacher Involvement in Planning factors suggests that teachers continue to have ambivalent feelings about the appropriate balance among responsibilities to their students, responsibilities for their own professional growth, and professional responsibilities beyond the classroom.

Six School Condition Variables

As each of these six schools experimented with various restructuring initiatives often resulting in re-negotiated roles,

rules, relationships and responsibilities six school condition factors were affected: principal leadership, teacher initiative in and control over school environment, student learning environments, discipline in the school, teacher involvement in planning activities in the school, and school climate. These six factors were operationally defined earlier in the paper as total factor scores on a teacher perception instrument. Table 1 is a display of teacher perception data for these six factors.

In an earlier presentation of interview data from principals, Bredeson (1989) reported that principals had a clear sense of what their teachers expected from them as leaders. Principals indicated that their teachers expected them to "listen, be supportive, provide feedback, endorse their decisions, model appropriate leadership behaviors, be knowledgeable, promote professionalism and create nurturing, supportive environments for professional work and development" (p. 16-17). Table 1 provides data regarding teachers' perceptions of their principal's leadership. The raw score reflects the degree to which teachers were satisfied with their principal's leadership in the school as reflected in eight positive statements. These data indicate that three faculties rated principal leadership in their schools below the 50th percentile. Clearly, the middle school teachers in Hillview School District were most dissatisfied with their principal as they made adjustments in their professional work lives through restructuring initiatives. Relations between the principal and

teachers were so strained in this school that little consensus on emerging roles, responsibilities and relationships was possible. The principal eventually saw the need to leave at the end of the school year for a central office position in another school district. These six principals were able to articulate what their teachers most expected of them but the data suggest that they were not always able to satisfy their teaching staffs in terms of their own leadership behaviors.

The principal interview data reported that teachers were very much involved in planning and decisionmaking activities in their schools. The data in Table 1 revealed that in five of the six schools teachers felt they had significant impact through their initiative in and control over school environment factors with percentiles ranging between the 60th to the 90th percentile. The teacher initiative score at Hillview Middle score, though at a higher percentile than the leader score, indicated that teachers felt they had less control over aspects of school environment than more than 70 percent of the other reporting middle schools in the state. This is not surprising given the likely halo effect of a soured organizational climate coupled with teachers' overall perception of poor leadership behaviors of the building principal.

One notable outcome of restructuring in these schools is the impact on student learning environments. In three schools problems related to interference with student learning appear to be minimized. At Elk Mountain High School, where student

learning is a priority for the principal and staff, the percentile band of 45-50 suggests that principal and staff need to work to limit disruptions to teaching/learning processes including problems related to teachers spending too much time on non-instructional duties which pull them away from teaching responsibilities. At Hillview Middle School the low percentile ranking contributed to the overall low satisfaction scores teachers indicated regarding teaching/learning environments in the school.

Discipline was perceived relatively favorably by teachers in four of the six schools. In Hillview, the lowest possible percentile ranking (1-5) reflected strong teacher beliefs about the handling of student discipline in school. In the five other schools, principals emphasized that teachers wanted the principal's unequivocal support, especially in conflicts with students or parents. One principal added. "When their ass is in a jam with parents, I support them." He then went on to say that even if he believed the teacher had mishandled the incident or used poor professional judgment, he supported them. He would deal with those problems later with the teacher.

In terms of teacher involvement in planning, five of six school teaching staffs saw themselves as highly involved in planning activities in the school with percentile ranging from a low of 80 to a high of 99. Hillview Middle School, in effect, was the outlier in terms of teacher involvement in planning. The principal at Hillview listed teacher contributions in planning in

the areas of staff development, curriculum revisions and teacher team meetings as examples of legitimate teacher involvement, not token involvement. Despite Principal-C's belief that traditions of trust in his building had allowed teachers to experiment, to fail, and to learn from their mistakes, teachers at Hillview reported that their participation was limited by an overly restrictive environment. In all six schools respondents identified the problem for teachers of trying to balance time and energy required for non-instructional duties against their primary responsibilities to students as classroom teachers.

School climate perceptions by teachers indicated a potential threat to restructuring initiatives and school improvement efforts. With the exception of Hillview, where teachers rated school climate in the lowest percentile band, it is important to understand the four items which were used as an operational definition of school climate on the teacher perception survey. The EQA instrument defined school climate as the degree to which teachers agreed with the following statements: 1.) The physical facilities of this school are generally unpleasant and poorly maintained. 2.) Adequate materials and supplies necessary for instruction are available to me. 3.) This school is a safe and secure place to work. 4.) I look forward to coming to work.

In the elementary school with a teaching-principal (Principal-A Table 1), the school climate score reflects frustrations over inadequate facilities and scarce supplies. In response to a question about what she would change if she were

not limited by dollars or policy, the principal said she would provide money and the freedom to spend those dollars to her teachers. In one high school, Principal-F described how the district used money in its budget to try out new ideas teachers generated in their planning teams. The fact that there was a comprehensive building plan for the secondary schools involving moves within the building for one year and a complete move to another location the next year were important contextual factors. The school climate percentile ranking of 35 was likely to have been strongly influenced by these realities affecting teacher work life.

Conclusion

A major purpose of this exploratory study was to examine principals' and teachers' perceptions of changes affecting their professional work as a result of restructuring. Previous presentations of data were based on principal interview alone. With single source information there is always the danger of developing descriptions of phenomena of interest which represent only one perspective. The teacher survey data provided the researcher with valuable insights into the perceptions of teachers experiencing changes resulting from these same restructuring initiatives. Analysis of two data sources provided opportunities to cross check earlier findings and to look for disconfirming evidence in terms of tentative explanations and emerging themes.

Teachers and principals in general reported similar

descriptions of and experiences with restructuring in their schools. Differences often were noted in role specific changes affecting teachers and principals. It is reasonable to assume that significant shifts in responsibilities and rules in school due to restructuring will affect role holders differently. The specifics of work role changes may vary, however, the broad effects of role transition and its consequences were reported in similar experiences for teachers and principals. Restructuring and empowerment are antecedent conditions of role conflict, role overload and role strain. Teachers and principals could view these as threats to their own professional effectiveness or as opportunities for growth and for limitless possibilities for enhancing professional work life and school outcomes for students.

Both teachers and principals described role tension for teachers as they became more empowered and more involved in decision arenas beyond the classroom. Non-instructional duties and time away from their primary responsibilities as classroom teachers clearly were beginning to dampen the enthusiasm and energies of teachers for taking on any more worthy projects and assignments.

An important finding from this study was that school environments soured by poor relations between teachers and the principal were likely to be non-supportive and possibly actively resistant to restructuring and empowerment initiatives. As was the case in Hillview Middle School, few if any positive outcomes

were discernible given the overall climate and morale. With a change in the principal, there was an opportunity to change the environment in which restructuring was occurring.

Both teachers and principals reported that restructuring and empowerment initiatives needed to enlist the support of both teachers and principals if such efforts were to be successful. Significant changes were unlikely if demands and ideas for restructuring were unidirectional. It was important to have a teaching/learning community where teachers and principals shared responsibility for local initiatives and for evaluation of successes and failures. Key facilitators of restructuring activities were time and money.

There are a number of implications for restructuring based on these findings. Regardless of the type of restructuring activities, it is important that teachers and principals, the key social actors most responsible for implementing change in schools, understand how particular changes in roles, rules and relationships affect role holders. As principals and teachers redefine and shape emerging professional roles, they must also inform others (students, parents and other stakeholders) the nature of these important changes brought about by restructuring. The notion of restructuring residuals in terms of outlived professional expectations and identities is important for educational stakeholders both inside and outside schools. Failure to acknowledge these changes and their implications for professional work life in schools would likely negate desired

improvements in educators' work life and in desired student and school outcomes.

Table 1

Teacher Perception Scores on Six School Condition Factors

Principal		School Condition Factors *Ldr.	Init.	Lrn.	Disc.	Plan	Clim.	Norm Group Size
A. Elementary Female Teaching Principal 8 Teachers Reporting	Raw Score Percentile**	28.88 85-90	33.13 90	24.50 90	24.63 90	20.38 85	12.13 5	(550)
B. Elementary Male Principal 24 Teachers Reporting	Raw Score Percentile	25.79 45-50	30.83 60-65	20.83 45-50	20.79 45	20.08 80-85	13.26 65-70	(550)
C. Middle School Male Principal 27 Teachers Reporting	Raw Score Percentile	15.84 5	25.27 25-30	15.27 5-10	11.59 1-5	13.16 10	7.04 1-5	(174)
D. Middle School Male Principal 48 Teachers Reporting	Raw Score Percentile	26.48 80-85	27.94 65-70	20.13 75-80	23.42 95-99	19.90 95-99	14.50 95-99	(174)
E. High School Male Principal 51 Teachers Reporting	Raw Score Percentile	25.65 85-90	27.31 75-80	17.61 45-50	18.75 55-60	19.57 95-99	13.78 95-99	(163)
F. High School Male Principal 34 Teachers Reporting	Raw Score Percentile	22.24 45-50	27.26 75-80	19.76 90	19.85 70-75	17.56 85-90	10.82 35	(163)

*Ldr. (Principal Leadership), Init. (teacher initiated environment), Lrn. (student learning environment), Disc. (discipline), Plan (teacher involvement in planning), Clim. (school climate).

**Percentiles are reported in increments of 5. Raw scores falling between percentile increments are noted as ranging between two percentiles.

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